Interview with Christopher Van Hollen

The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Project

AMBASSADOR CHRISTOPHER VAN HOLLEN

Interviewed by: Charles Stuart Kennedy

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Q: Lets' start with your background. Where did you live in your youth and where did you get your education?

VAN HOLLEN: I grew up in Baltimore, Md. My family had been in the State of Maryland for many years. I graduated from the Gilman School in Baltimore and then, following my father's foot-steps, I went to Haverford College outside of Philadelphia. My Haverford career was split. I was there for two years at the beginning of the 40s, then I went into the Navy from 1943-46—I was an officer for part of that time—and afterward I returned to Haverford graduating in 1947. Then I returned to Baltimore and entered John Hopkins' graduate school. I received a Ph.D. in Political Science in 1951.

A few days after I had finished my graduate program at Hopkins, I joined the Department of State, in June 1951, in the Executive Secretariat.

Q: How did you become interested in the Department of State?

VAN HOLLEN: When I was in graduate school, I had three things that I was interested in: one, teaching; the second, journalism and the third was the field of foreign affairs. As I went through graduate school, my interest in foreign affairs intensified and I decided to

enter the Department of State. I was older than most of the others who were trying to enter the Department, because of the length of my academic studies. Therefore, I entered the Department rather than the Foreign Service and converted to the latter in 1954, as part of the Wriston program.

Q: You were with the Secretariat from 1951-54. What were you doing?

VAN HOLLEN: I was basically doing support work for the Secretary of State and for the senior officers of the Department. It was one of the best jobs that any person entering the Foreign Service could have had at that time because you got an extraordinary overview of the Department, even through you were young and very junior. You worked with some of the top people in the Department, not closely in every case, but in a staff support position. For example, I worked on a number of conferences or other activities involving Dean Acheson, who in my judgement, has been the outstanding Secretary of State of my lifetime. Within a few months of joining the Department, I was on foreign trips—to Germany, to Korea, to the NATO Conference in Lisbon in February 1952 (that was the meeting at which Turkey and Greece joined NATO). I was at an ideal vantage point from which to learn how the foreign policy machinery of our government worked. This was true both for the Department and other agencies because one was in close touch with Department of Defense and with the NSC—we worked very closely with the NSC staff. It was an ideal place to start a career.

Q: What was your impression of the relationships between the Department of State, the NSC and Defense in the 1951-54 period?

VAN HOLLEN: As a general statement, I would say that the relationship between State, NSC and Defense was very good, certainly in the early period of my involvement in the Department of State. One of the reasons for that was the extraordinary relationship between President Harry Truman and Secretary Dean Acheson. There probably could not have been two more dissimilar individuals in terms of background or temperament,

but they got along extremely well. One of the reasons was that Dean Acheson recognized the primacy of the Presidency. When Jimmy Byrnes was Secretary of State, he didn't recognize that. He had hoped to become President himself. Acheson, on the other hand, was very careful during international conferences to either report by telegram or telephone to the President, so that there would be no surprises for Harry Truman on major issues. It was a very creative period of American diplomacy. It was a period when NATO was getting underway; it was the period of the Truman Doctrine; it was one of the more exciting periods in American diplomacy. I feel very pleased and privileged to have joined the Department at that time.

Q: Were you there during the transition between the Truman Administration and the Eisenhower one?

VAN HOLLEN: I was. There were some bumpy aspects to that period, particularly when John Foster Dulles, as the new Secretary in early 1953, assembled the State Department employees outside the building. It was a cold day. He made a statement to the effect that loyalty up begets loyalty down or something like that. The suggestion was that some of the Department's people might be less than loyal to the new Administration. I must also underscore the fact that this was the McCarthy era and there was tremendous suspicion of the Department of State in some quarters—from Congress and from parts of the American public and press. Acheson, as Secretary of State, had borne the brunt of some of these attacks very effectively. When John Foster Dulles came in, there was a concern among a number of people in the Department, including myself, that Dulles questioned the loyalty of the people in the Department. Let me emphasize, however, that this was a transient period. By the end of 1953, Dulles felt more secure in his position as Secretary and the bureaucracy was more comfortable in dealing with him. So after a rather rocky start, the relationship worked out reasonably well.

Q: You served in the Secretariat during the height of the McCarthy period. How did you as a junior person feel about this period?

VAN HOLLEN: It did not affect me personally, but it did have an impact. Some of the senior people I dealt with were particularly sensitive to being seen as “soft” on Communism and related issues. This naturally affected people down the line in State as a spin-off effect. That was part of the atmosphere at the time. It tended to make it harder to debate issues within the Department than it might have otherwise been.

Q: You suggest that there may have been a certain amount of posturing to appear ideologically sound.

VAN HOLLEN: Yes, but that is not entirely unique. Top political leaders in Government Departments in the United States, whether State or Defense or elsewhere, are often adjusting to or reflecting domestic political pressures. That was certainly true in the early 50s. It became less so with the reduction of power of McCarthy, with the increasing self-confidence of the Administration, and with the re-election of President Eisenhower in 1956. But it was certainly part of the atmosphere from early 1953 into 1954.

Q: Did you feel that when Dulles came in, despite his prejudices, surrounded as he was by professionals, there was strong leadership? Did they know where they wanted to go?

VAN HOLLEN: Yes and no. You did have the professionals who were carried on into the Eisenhower-Dulles Administration. One felt comfortable with them because one knew them. At the same time, John Foster Dulles had on his personal staff two people—John Hanes, who later became a good friend—and Roderic O'Connor, who died some years ago. These two came in with Dulles and worked in his outer office. They threw their weight around rather effectively in the first year. Again, it was part of a new Administration's effort to put its own imprint on both policy and the modus operandi of the Department. Even though this does occur with every new Administration, I felt it perhaps more because I had not experienced any other transition period in my career. During subsequent transitions, I was sometimes overseas.

Q: From 1954-55, you were in Delhi and from 1955-58 you were in Calcutta. How did you get into the Indian circuit?

VAN HOLLEN: I became interested in India because of the belief in that period that this country, in its early independence days, would become an increasingly important power in Asia. India began under the strong leadership of Jawaharlal Nehru as the Prime Minister. India played an important role in the non-aligned movement which was important in those days with Nehru, Sukarno of Indonesia, Nasser of Egypt and Tito of Yugoslavia as the major leaders. I was drawn to India by what I anticipated would be the emerging importance of India internationally. This did not turn out to be the case. I would say that India's role internationally, and India's position in U.S. foreign policy priorities, has not been as high as I had anticipated in the mid-50s. There were people during that period—Chester Bowles, in particular, who was twice Ambassador to India— who put a great deal of emphasis on India's international importance and who saw India as a key competitor to the Peoples Republic of China. They emphasized the need for the U.S. to take into account India's global importance, not just its regional role. Chester Bowles exaggerated this importance and, in the eyes of many, India has not achieved the international role that it aspired to in the 1950s or others had expected of it.

Q: As a member of the entrance class of 1955, we looked around the world, looking for places that would be exciting and at the same time, would not become a backwater.

VAN HOLLEN: This was undoubtedly a calculation too from a career point of view. After I had finished the my tour in the Secretariat, the question then became “What post should I seek which would be substantively interesting and would also be a good post from the point of view of career progression”. I was as interested in that as anybody. Looking back, I don't know whether people who went to South Asia in the 1950s in the Foreign Service have, in relation to other geographical areas, moved ahead all that fast. It is hard to judge.

Q: The compass keeps swinging from one point to another depending on the time. The Soviet specialists used to be that stars at one time, but probably have not done as well recently. What type of work were you doing in New Delhi and then Calcutta?

VAN HOLLEN: I was basically a political officer. Let me say that originally, I had wanted to go to Calcutta rather then New Delhi, but I was transferred to Calcutta after only serving in Delhi for eight months. I was not very happy about it at the time because, by then, I had become adjusted to the Embassy and was enjoying myself. Then, all of a sudden, orders came from Washington saying “You are transferred to Calcutta”. People who sent the orders undoubtedly thought that I should be happy, but, initially, I was not because I had become happy and satisfied with the Delhi assignment.

It turned out that Calcutta was a very stimulating post. It was not in the Capital of the country and, therefore, one had an opportunity to get in touch with a number of people who were not part of the Indian bureaucracy or who were not part of a very large diplomatic corps. It was a very exciting place politically because you had to cover all of Eastern India and you also covered the relationship between Eastern India and East Pakistan (now Bangladesh). The political officer in Calcutta in those days was also dually accredited to Nepal because it was the height of the cold war and the era of Sino-Soviet cooperation, one was expected to cover a whole host of East-West political issues which were being fought out in Calcutta. The politics there were very volatile.

Q: As a non-expert at this time, how did you report Indian politics?

VAN HOLLEN: One of the great joys of serving in India was the fact that it was in fact a new democracy. You did have easy access to all elements in the Indian society both in New Delhi and Calcutta. There was a general hesitancy at that time about dealing with members of the Communist Party. We were not prohibited, but it certainly was not encouraged. I remember that I did have an opportunity to have a number of contacts with members of the Communist Party in West Bengal. I felt pleased that I was able to talk

to them about political developments. The task there was to report on domestic political developments in four large East India States: West Bengal, Bihar, Assam and Orissa. In those days, much more than now, there was a great deal of emphasis on keeping Washington informed on the political developments in individual Indian states. With budgetary constraints and personnel cutbacks, that is less so today. But at that time, as a young officer in my thirties, I would travel outside of Calcutta to these other jurisdictions, often with my wife, and talk to Chief Ministers, Cabinet Ministers and others.

Q: What were our major concerns in India?

VAN HOLLEN: On the broad international level, and in terms of US-India bilateral relationships, our main concern was that India, while professing to be non-aligned, was in fact tilting toward the Soviet Union and China, in a period during which those two countries had a close relationship. It was a period in which Krishna Menon, the Indian Foreign Minister, epitomized non-alignment and anti-Americanism, at least in the eyes of a lot of Western officials and the American public. So in the international and bilateral fields, the concern was that Indian policy not undermine American objectives which, to a substantial degree, were designed to develop a containment policy vis-a-vis the Sino-Soviet bloc. Domestically, we were concerned about India's drift to the left. India has had for many years significant Communist Parties of various types. The Communist Party in West Bengal was particularly potent as was the Communist Party in Kerala in South India. Therefore, in terms of domestic reporting, it was focused on the question of the extent to which Indian state governments were likely to move to the left, often meaning that Communist elements were gaining power.

Q: You might say that the over-all policy even in Calcutta was part of the Cold War.

VAN HOLLEN: That is correct. It was in the mid- 1950s and the Cold War was the dominant concern. We worried that the Communist strength, which could be seen in the close relationship between the PRC and the Soviet Union, would expand into South Asia.

It was felt that India because of its “soft” non-aligned policy and because of the strength of the indigenous Communist Parties was a prime target for the expansion of Communist influence. It did not turn out that way, but that was the concern.

Q: How did you and colleagues see these dangers?

VAN HOLLEN: I would have to review my own reports. I don't remember them in that much detail, but my feeling is that I was careful not to over-emphasize the “red menace” because India had enormous strengths through the Congress Party which was the vehicle for Indian independence. It had a very effective leadership cadre, not just in New Delhi in Jawaharlal Nehru, but in a number of the State governments. While there was concern about the growing strength of the left, in retrospect that threat seems to have been overly stated. I hope that my reporting was as balanced as it should have been under the circumstances.

Q: We are all creatures of our times. What was your impression of the officials you met. How did they view the U.S.?

VAN HOLLEN: Like so many other matters, it is hard to generalize. In India, you had a very broad spectrum and you could talk to people on the right who were very concerned about what they saw as excessive Communist and left- wing power in India. You could talk to people on the left who were critical of corruption in the Congress Party and who believed that the United States, in part because of its support of Pakistan (an important element in the picture then), was acting against Indian interests. There was a broad enough spectrum in India so that one can't say that the then prevailing view was X, Y or Z. There were many viewpoints and that is what made it so fascinating to serve there.

Q: Were you able to report much on East Pakistan—now Bangladesh?

VAN HOLLEN: We didn't report all that much on that from Calcutta. Sometimes we would report on border clashes. I went up to Dacca several times. We sometimes took turns

taking the diplomatic pouch from Calcutta to Dacca. I can remember going with the pouch and meeting the Consul General—who was a man by the name of Bill Williams, who sometimes dressed as if the British had never left. He would wear a white tunic, white shorts, white stockings to his knees and a pith helmet. He would receive us very kindly and serve us gimlets, made with gin and Rose's Lime Juice. We would spend the rest of the day in Dacca and then return to Calcutta. Each officer in Calcutta did this about once every eight months. So there was a contact between the Consulates General in Dacca and Calcutta. We did some reporting on East Pakistan but most of the Indo-Pakistan reporting was done by New Delhi.

Q: How were the relationships between Delhi and Calcutta? Were they reporting one India and you another?

VAN HOLLEN: We had a lot of autonomy in Calcutta. I was lucky enough to receive several commendations from Washington for my reporting which gave me a certain amount of self-confidence that I was doing at least what Washington wanted. Copies of the commendations would go to the Embassy. So I did not feel, as some constituent posts have felt, that we were kept on too close a leash by the Embassy in the Capital. On the contrary, I felt that we had a lot of freedom and autonomy in terms of picking political reporting priorities and in terms of our ability to get out of the city to develop the information. Having said that, we did operate under certain guidelines from Washington. At least once a year, you would get guidelines from Washington on the kind of political reporting that the Department was particularly interested in. This was helpful and kept one focused on specific reporting targets. Beyond that I did not feel under constraints.

Q: In 1958, you moved to the other side of the border and the dispute. You were assigned to Karachi until 1960 and then to what is now known as Islamabad until 1961.

VAN HOLLEN: That is correct. Between my tours in India and Pakistan, the Department sent me, at my request, to the University of California in Berkeley. I spent an academic

year in the South Asia program at the University—which was a very strong program. I learned a little Hindi and Urdu—Hindi being the predominant language in North India and Urdu the language in what was West Pakistan. The idea was that having served in India, and in the anticipation of serving in Pakistan, it would be useful for me to have a year of area and language study at California. The Department was very enlightened from that point of view. It was an interesting year.

After that I was assigned to Karachi which was then the Capital of Pakistan. I was the number two political officer in the Embassy. The Ambassador when I arrived was James Langley and he was followed by William Rountree. Langley, who had been a newspaper editor, was a political appointee from New Hampshire—he was a Sherman Adams man. He was taciturn. Rountree was a professional of the old school. He was very good Ambassador. Langley had a DCM—Ridgway Knight— was also a diplomat of the old school. He was a Western European specialist with a French wife, spoke beautiful French and was probably wondering what he was doing in Karachi. He once told me that he didn't think anybody should go into the Foreign Service who didn't have a private income. He was a great connoisseur of wines. Karachi was not a cultural or intellectual center in those days. Nevertheless, Ridgway Knight was there as the number two to James Langley. Knight and Langley worked together reasonably well.

Q: We in the Foreign Service have the tendency to identify with the country in which we are serving. How did you adapt coming from India who had been Pakistan's archrival for many years? Did you have a different view of India from that of your colleagues in Pakistan?

VAN HOLLEN: It was valuable for me to have served in India. It was also valuable for me to have gone to the South Asia program at California because I did get a balanced view that you don't get if you only serve in one of the two countries. South Asia is one case—duplicated in other areas—in which a bitter conflict between two countries, India and Pakistan in this case, is the key foreign policy and security issue in the region. There

were other South Asian countries, all smaller, but the India- Pakistan relationship was central and in those days. In the late 50s and early 60s, Pakistan was seen as almost the equivalent of India in terms of power and strength. The countries had fought at the time of independence and the threat of war was present throughout my stay in South Asia. There might have been some parochialism, but the career Foreign Service officers who were doing political work were reasonably balanced in terms of reporting on the issues between the two countries. I don't think the people in New Delhi were over-influenced by Indian rhetoric and the same in Karachi for Pakistani views.

Q: Of course, that the time, we were a little bit aloof and not very happy with the international rhetoric which makes it a little easier to stay uninvolved.

VAN HOLLEN: At that time, we were not deeply involved in South Asia. We were fairly detached.

Q: What then were our main interests in Pakistan?

VAN HOLLEN: Our interests were significant because, from the mid-50s, Pakistan was seen as one of the key countries in terms of the containment policy against the Soviet Union and the PRC. Pakistan was a member of the Baghdad Pact, which also included the British, Iraq, Turkey and Iran. The Baghdad Pact was established with strong American support. Pakistan was considered a key member of the Pact. Pakistan was also a member of the Southeast Asia Treaty organization (SEATO) which was set up for a somewhat similar purpose—the containment of the USSR and the PRC. Therefore Pakistan was seen by some people as the “linchpin” between those two security organizations. SEATO also included Thailand and the Philippines. Pakistan was the only South Asian country which belonged to both the Baghdad Pact (later CENTO) and to SEATO. It was therefore seen as a key country in terms of stemming the advance of communism into South and Southeast Asia. For that reason—particularly in the Eisenhower administration—Pakistan rated quite high in terms of American foreign policy interests in that part of the world.

Beginning in about 1955, we began to supply Pakistan with a substantial amount of military equipment. This in turn created continuing problems with India. While the US said that it was providing military assistance to Pakistan to meet the communist threat, the Indians—and privately a number of Pakistanis—believed that the US-supplied arms were actually boosting Pakistan's threat to their country. There is no question that there was a certain ambivalent viewpoint in the sense that many Pakistanis did give lip service to the importance of the Baghdad Pact and SEATO when seeking military assistance from the United States. At the same time, they did recognize that these two organizations, by being the rationale for military assistance, were enhancing Pakistan's strength vis-a-vis India which continued to be Pakistan's unquestioned enemy—more so than the Soviet Union or the PRC.

Q: In your reporting, did you feel under any constrains about reporting how the Pakistanis felt?

VAN HOLLEN: I am sure that at the Ambassadorial level there was probably a tendency to play down the fact that the Pakistanis saw the Indians as the key threat. There was also the Congressional angle, as there usually is in such cases. In order to get funds from the Congress for military supplies for Pakistan, the Communist threat was an important element. Even though aid was going to Pakistan for this purpose, some Pakistanis, at least privately, admitted that it helped Pakistan vis-a-vis India. Nonetheless, we went through the charade of highlighting the Soviet threat, even though people knew in their hearts that the Pakistanis were receiving the US military aid to counter what they saw as a larger threat from India.

Q: What was the political situation in Pakistan at the time you were there from 1958 to 1961?

VAN HOLLEN: When I first arrived in Pakistan, there was a coup d'etat in the summer of 1958, when the government of Feroz Khan Noon was replaced by a government later

headed by Mohammed Ayub Khan. It was not a democratic government in the true sense of the word. Ayub was a military man. He was one of a number of military men who have headed Pakistan. But during the period I was in Pakistan, there was relative stability in the aftermath of the coup that took place in August, 1958. The US relationship with Ayub was quite a good one. I remember that when Ayub came to the United States for a State visit in 1961 or 1962, the State dinner given by President Kennedy was one of the most splendid ones given by any Administration. It was given at Mount Vernon. The guests came down from Washington on a boat on the Potomac. The Kennedys really laid themselves out. This was partially because of Jacqueline Kennedy's creativity in terms of providing some variety for State dinners. But it also underscored the importance the U.S. attached to its relationship with Pakistan by giving Ayub a very special dinner. I cite that simply as a reflection, in protocol terms, of the strong relationship that had developed. That relationship, however, began to change in the 60s while Kennedy was still in the White House.

It began to change as Pakistan was strengthening its ties to the PRC—a country with which the U.S. then had a very antagonistic relationship. It changed further with the war between China and India in October 1962 when the United States, at the strong urging of the United States Ambassador in New Delhi, John Kenneth Galbraith, provided military assistance to India in the aftermath of the Chinese attack. This put a strain in the U.S.-Pakistan relationship and it was really in the early 60s that there began a cooling of a relationship which was at its closest for roughly a five- year period between 1955 and 1960. So from 1962 or, in the late Kennedy and early Johnson administrations, one found something of a shift in the Pakistan-U.S. relationship.

Q: What was the nature of your political reporting since you were in a military-run state?

VAN HOLLEN: Partly because Pakistan, like India, had grown out of the British colonial system, partly because many Pakistanis spoke English, you had easy access— although somewhat more constrictive than in India. A political officer could move around easily in

Pakistan. This made the assignment very enjoyable. I found it stimulating in career terms. I benefitted from developments in Pakistan because at the time I was there, President Ayub Khan made the decision to move the Capital from Karachi to the North and to establish a new Capital in Islamabad. It was somewhat similar to an earlier decision by the British-Indian government when it shifted the Capital from Calcutta to New Delhi or the Australian government when it shifted the Capital from Sydney to Canberra. Ayub felt that Karachi was not truly Pakistani; it was tainted by external influences and corruption. In his view Islamabad, in Punjab Province, represented the real heartland of Pakistan. So he made the decision to move the Capital to Islamabad. In preparing to move the Capital, he started by shifting a large part of the government, not to Islamabad which had not yet been build, but to the adjacent city of Rawalpindi, which was an important city in the Punjab. So you had a situation in which the Foreign Office stayed temporarily in Karachi while most of the government moved 900 miles north to Rawalpindi in anticipation of the building of a new Capital in Islamabad.

The U.S. government was faced with an amusing and in some ways embarrassing situation. We had just finished constructing a very large Embassy in Karachi—a big, impressive building downtown—just as Ayub reached his decision. This building must be one of the largest Consulate General buildings in the world now. At the time the government shifted to Rawalpindi in anticipation of building Islamabad, it told the foreign diplomatic missions that it did not have enough accommodations in Rawalpindi even for its own bureaucrats, much less for Embassy personnel. But the Pakistanis told the American Embassy that if it was really interested, they would find accommodations for the US in a place called Murree, which was in the sub-mountains of the Himalayas— located 40 miles north of Rawalpindi, higher at a 7,500 foot altitude. It used to be a British hill station before Pakistan became independent. The US accepted the Pakistani offer.

I was named by Ambassador Rountree to be “Officer-in- Charge” of what became to be known as the “Murree Office of the American Embassy.” I was transferred with my wife and my first child, who was born in Karachi, by military attach# plane. We were flown to

Rawalpindi and drove to Murree— about an hour and half drive up into the mountains —and on George Washington's Birthday, 1960—I raised the flag over the Murree Office of the American Embassy. The ceremony was attended by a small, very cold group of people, including the divisional forest officer, the local magistrate, and the general from the nearby cantonment. We had a small office there for about four years. I was only there for 18 months. The purpose of the Murree Office was to maintain some kind of representation between the U.S. government and those elements of the Pakistani government which had moved to Rawalpindi and to do general political-economic reporting.

Later, when Islamabad was completed, Murree was closed and the Embassy shifted from Karachi. I was in Murree in the interim period which from a career point of view was a real plus because I was named the head of a small staff—five people. I wrote up my experiences for the Foreign Service Journal in the early 60s in an article entitled “Mission to Murree”. It was a very unique post and I sometimes tended to forget that I was not the American Ambassador to Pakistan, as William Rountree gently reminded me at times. For example, I sent several telegrams directly to Washington. We had to do this on a “one time pad”—a very primitive coding device. He made it clear to me—in diplomatic terms —that I should report through Karachi. Murree was a very unusual post in the sense that to get to the government of Pakistan in Rawalpindi I had to travel an hour and half down the mountain and an hour and a half back—three hours for a round trip. When I was down in Rawalpindi, if I wanted to spend the night, I would have to use the AID guesthouse. If I went down for a social function with my wife, the choice was either drive back late at night on a very winding, difficult road or spend the night in the guest house. Murree gave me the opportunity, as a relatively young officer, to run my own post. I think I was seen by Washington to have done a reasonably good job and that helped me in career terms.

Q: You then returned to the Department to deal with NATO Affairs from 1961 to 1964. What were your main interests in this job?

VAN HOLLEN: During this period, I was in charge of a small unit within the Bureau of European Affairs. In that Bureau there is an office called Office of Regional Political-Military Affairs (RPM). Within that, I was in charge of preparing guidance for the US Permanent Representative to NATO, who was then in Paris—Thomas Finletter—concerning political issues on which we could share information with our allies. There was a great deal of emphasis on what was called political consultation. That meant, to the degree that we could, we would share with the other thirteen NATO countries assessments of political issues in different parts of the world, or provide advance word on what we were planning to do as a government. My task was to keep in touch with all relevant parts of the Department and prepare regular telegrams to Paris on key political issues—for example, the US view on the situation in the Middle East—to try to give our NATO partners a feeling that they were part of the American political assessment process. We were prepared to consult in advance on a number of issues if they were non-sensitive or uncontentious. If we were concerned that our NATO partners might object, however, we would not always consult. So political consultation was great in theory, but in practice we judged the degree to which we consulted by the effect such consultation might have on our own interests.

Q: You would draft a telegram summarizing our position. Would some one censor it?

VAN HOLLEN: They might. We really had to rely on other parts of the Bureau of European Affairs or on other parts of the Department of State. We did not in my unit have the substantive expertise to put together a telegram on specific issues. We would have to go other Bureaus and ask them to draft a message on the specific issue. They usually gave us something which they had already prepared for some other purpose, rather than writing something specially for us. As you know in the Department, one Bureau doesn't want to spend its time writing material for another Bureau. We had to live “off the land” and encourage other parts of the Department to permit us to send political assessments to Paris. That also meant that they would have to clear any messages that we might have

sent. My task was really to negotiate the text of the messages to Paris. I had working with me John Gunther Dean—later Ambassador to India. There were only two of us in that unit, but RPM as a whole was a very strong office: George Vest was in and out, Walter Stoessel—later Ambassador to Moscow—was the Political Advisor to the Allied Commander in Europe (POLAD), Dave Popper and Ron Spiers headed RPM. It was a very interesting period and quite different from South Asia.

Q: You went to the War College from 1964 to 1965 and then you were assigned to Ankara, Turkey as Political Counselor from 1965 to 1968. What were the main issues that you addressed in Turkey during this period?

VAN HOLLEN: The key international problem for Turkey then and now was its relationship with Greece; the contentious issue then and now was Cyprus. The task for American diplomacy was to maintain reasonably satisfactory relations with both Turkey and Greece since both were members of NATO and we believed that it was very important to keep a degree of cohesion in the southeastern flank of NATO at a time when these countries were on the verge of war. It was almost a replay if the India-Pakistan situation. It was obviously different, but there were similar elements.

There was a crisis over Cyprus in 1967. Cyrus Vance, later Secretary of State, was involved in it. The main task for American diplomacy was to assure the Turks of continued U.S. support while at the same time we were seeking to maintain satisfactory relationships with Greece. The domestic political equation on the Greek-Turkey question is that there are many more Greek-Americans than there are Turkish- Americans. That created domestic pressures favoring the Greeks. At the same time, Turkey was considered as very important in the NATO context because of its border with the Soviet Union. This was at a time of the Cold War so that there was strong emphasis on supporting Turkey as a NATO partner which was protecting the Eastern flank of NATO and which was threatened by the Soviet Union. This factor was constantly mentioned when the question of military aid arose.

Q: As Political Counselor, you talked to the Turkish Foreign Ministry and others. Were the Turks more concerned about the USSR than the Greeks, whose exclusive focus was Turkey?

VAN HOLLEN: The Turks were very much concerned about the Greek role in Cyprus. They were concerned about the impact of mainland Greek activities on the island vis-a-vis the Turkish minority, which comprised about 20 percent of the Cyprus population. They were very, very sensitive to any efforts by Greece to put into effect ENOSIS which was the union of Greece and Cyprus. While the Turks had the military power and the population advantage to prevail in a military confrontation with Greece, they were less certain on Cyprus, partly because of the geography of Cyprus, partly because of the concern about the international impact of a Turkish invasion of Cyprus. When Turkey did invade the Island, this caused a suspension of U.S. aid—this occurred after my tour. Incidentally, for those who are interested in this period, Parker Hart, the former Ambassador, has just written a book on his experiences in Turkey, including the Cyprus crisis of 1967.

Q: How were the Turks to deal with? Were they greatly different from the South Asians?

VAN HOLLEN: A lot of people felt that they had difficulty dealing with the Indians because of the perceived “Indian arrogance” and India's alleged disdain for America. That was very much overstated. I did not have any difficulty in dealing with the Indians or the Pakistanis, either. The Turks were quite easy to deal with. By and large U.S.-Turkey relationships were fairly good and that may have helped matters. The aid levels were holding up reasonably well. Turkey had a pretty good reputation in the United States. Some of that went back to Turkish support for the U.S. effort in Korea when the Turks sent troops. They also had a very good top-level Foreign Ministry careerist by the name of Ilter Turkmen, who later became Ambassador to France and the UN. I had a very good relationship with him. Over all, the relationship was good. On the other hand, at the Ambassadorial level, Ambassador Hart took a lot of knocks from the Turkish press on the Cyprus question.

Q: How did the Turks view the Soviets?

VAN HOLLEN: It is hard to judge motivation, but the answer is that they felt threatened because of Soviet pressures after World War II in Eastern Turkey and in the Bosporus waterways. At the same time, there probably were elements in the picture similar to those prevailing in the U.S.-Pakistan relationship. While the Turks were concerned about the Soviet threat, they were also interested in U.S. military assistance in the context of maintaining their military superiority over Greece. In relative terms, the Turks saw a more direct threat from the USSR than did Pakistan, which at the time had the advantage of having Afghanistan as a separation between it and the Soviet Union. There was a bit of ambivalence on the Turkish side as well in the sense that they recognized that emphasis on the Soviet threat enhanced their prospects for U.S. military assistance for themselves.

Q: From 1968 to 1969, you were Country Director for India, Ceylon and Nepal and then you became a Deputy Assistant Secretary for the Near East and South Asia Bureau for three years starting in 1969. What were the main issues that concerned you?

VAN HOLLEN: From 1968 to 1972 was the most interesting period of my Foreign Service career. It was also the most difficult because I was directly involved in Indo-Pakistan conflict over East Pakistan, later Bangladesh. In March 1971, this came to a head with the crack-down by Pakistani forces on what they considered as dissident elements in East Pakistan. I have written this up in some detail in an article in Asian Survey which came out in 1980 called “The Tilt Policy Revisited”. For me the basic problem at the time was that under Joe Sisco, then the NEA Assistant Secretary, I was essentially in charge of South Asian policy- -Afghanistan through East Pakistan and Nepal and Sri Lanka. The Nixon Administration, with Henry Kissinger as National Security Advisor—was leaning strongly in the direction of Pakistan. Therefore, when the Pakistanis cracked down in East Pakistan in March, 1971, the Administration sought to cushion the impact in terms of Congressional and American public reaction. There was considerable public revulsion. The sentiment on the Hill, the public at large and the academic community was very much in opposition to

Pakistani action of March 1971 and subsequent actions that led to the two-week war in December 1971 between India and Pakistan. The Indian forces prevailed and Pakistan's defeat led to the creation of a new country—Bangladesh.

The Nixon Administration was predisposed to Pakistan for a variety of reasons. For one, Pakistan had a role in the security arrangements, as I discussed earlier—Baghdad Pact (later CENTO) and SEATO. Second, it had a rather negative attitude toward India, driven by Nixon's personal view which was a factor. Third, and most important from an operational point of view, Pakistan, headed by General Yahya Khan, was the key intermediary between the U.S. and China during the secret negotiations for an opening of U.S.-Sino relations which was developed by Nixon and implemented in the 1971 period by Henry Kissinger. This last factor was unknown to people at a relatively high level such as myself. Included in these secret dialogues was Kissinger's secret trip to China in the summer of 1971.

It should be remembered that, at this time, China was seen as one of the most irreconcilable enemies of the United States. The U.S.-China relationship was bitterly conflictive, so that the Kissinger mission to China, which was announced publicly in August 1971, was a very dramatic event.

Q: It should also be noted that at the time, we were still heavily involved in the Vietnam war in which the Chinese were supporting our opponents.

VAN HOLLEN: The Vietnamese war was still part of the picture. The whole China initiative was considered as a key foreign policy initiative of the Nixon Administration. There were a number of reasons for that initiative including the use of China as an offset to the Soviet Union. Because Pakistan was seen as a key intermediary in this process, Nixon and Kissinger were very reluctant to take any action against Pakistan which might upset the evolution of the U.S.- Chinese relationship through the good offices of Pakistan, which had at that time a good relationship with China. My problem, as Deputy Assistant Secretary

handling South Asian issues, was that I felt that we should be pursuing a more even-handed policy toward India and Pakistan, rather than tilting toward the latter. Of course, I had no knowledge of the negotiations with the Chinese. I was not alone. The Secretary of State, William Rogers, was not aware of the Kissinger mission to China until Kissinger was about to get on the plane in Islamabad to fly to China in the summer of 1971. The entire State Department was cut out of the picture. The opening to China was run almost exclusively out of the White House.

So 1971 was a particularly difficult period for me. I was also chosen to defend U.S. policy on the Hill, which was not an easy task because the sentiment was overwhelmingly opposed to the Pakistani actions in East Pakistan.

Q: What were your feelings about the conflict?

VAN HOLLEN: It was a very difficult situation in terms of the reporting from New Delhi and Islamabad because we had in India at the time as Ambassador, Kenneth Keating, former Senator from New York and a man who had been active in Republican politics. In Pakistan, our Ambassador was Joseph Farland, a political appointee, whose wife had made money in the coal industry in West Virginia. We got into a situation in which Keating's reporting from Delhi was seen by many people in Washington as being very supportive of the Indian position while Farland was endorsing the Pakistan position. They were at loggerheads many times openly in their reporting. No one could have been objective in a situation like that. There had to be a certain amount of subjectivity. Emotions ran very high. Policy and personality differences ran very high between Keating and Farland. This complicated the Washington task of accurately assessing the political situation in the area.

Q: Did this personal tension force you to by-pass these two political appointees by calling the Political Counselors in the two Embassies?

VAN HOLLEN: We didn't do much of that because this was an era before the frequent use of telephones became the vogue. I have now been out of the Department for ten years and I am therefore not up to date on current developments, but I have the impression that telephones are used much, much more now. We used the phone when I was in the NATO job to call Paris, but in the South Asia affairs, perhaps because of the distance or the time differential, we did not use it very often. This doesn't mean that we didn't get a lot of information independently from the Ambassadors. We would get “Official-Informal” letters in which the author could speak with great deal of candor. Those were separate from the telegraphic traffic. We would also have staff members of the two embassies come back to Washington. People went to Delhi and Islamabad for visits. So there was an extraordinary amount of information available through informal channels. In addition to the Embassy and intelligence cable reporting, which came in great quantities, we had people who gave us the “real picture” on a private basis.

Q: What role did the Consul General in Dacca report?

VAN HOLLEN: This was one of the more dramatic aspects of 1971. At the time of the Pakistan crack-down, there was a tendency in Washington, because of the sensitivity of the opening to China, to try to play down the brutality and repression in East Pakistan. We did decide after the Pakistani troops moved in, to withdraw most of our personnel from Dacca. The language used by the Department was that we were “thinning out” our staff. But this official language used to explain our reaction to the Pakistani crackdown was very upsetting to the people in Dacca who were on the ground.

A special communications channel had been developed earlier, called the “Dissent Channel” which was to be used as a private channel to the Secretary from State Department people who disagreed with any policy then in effect. The Consul General in Dacca, Archer Blood, sent in a message through the “Dissent Channel” which took sharp issue with the Department's characterization of events and the use of the term “thin out” instead of “evacuation”. Blood argued that Americans, in good conscience, should be

more open in their criticism of the Pakistani military actions. We also had some dissent within the Bureau of Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs. Very able, younger officers went to see Joe Sisco, then Assistant Secretary of State, reinforcing the view of the Dacca staff. Then, inevitably, there were leaks to the press. The “Dissent Channel” cable sent by Blood and signed by about everybody in the Dacca Consulate General turned up in the Washington Post. These leaks and the great disquiet among some of the younger Foreign Service officers involved in South Asian affairs also got in the press. It helped to fuel the strong opposition to U.S. policy that was already present in the Congress and among the public. It is often forgotten that this issue generated considerable public debate. There were one or two rallies in Madison Square Garden on behalf of the Bengalis. The strong public sentiment favored stronger U.S. actions against Pakistan. But of course what was going on behind the scene, relating to the opening to China, from March, 1971 to August, 1971, was an entirely separate activity. I was completely unaware of this, as was Joe Sisco.

Q: Did you and Sisco discuss informally the NSC views and guidance?

VAN HOLLEN: Not much. Joe Sisco adjusted more easily than I did to the prevailing policy guidelines. He was basically very interested in the Arab-Israeli problem and much less so in South Asia, although he recognized that it was one of his key responsibilities. He was therefore for various reasons quite willing to let me testify in Congress. I was served up as the sacrificial lamb. I was very concerned. At one time, I was on the verge of resigning because of the strong differences I had with the policy. I remember writing out in long hand a resignation letter. Then I thought that this might be just a one-day story in the press. Everybody would say that I resigned for good cause but it wouldn't have much effect on U.S. policy. I decided I could be more effective staying in the system and expressing my views as an active member of the Department. So I didn't go through with it, but I did consider resignation. It was a very difficult personal period.

Q: Did you have trouble with your junior officers?

VAN HOLLEN: Yes. Some of them, who were very able and knew South Asia—most had served in the area—were very upset. So we did have pressures from below, but I never told them about my own feelings or that I had considered resignation. I shared my concerns with my wife. 1971 was my most difficult period in the Foreign Service. In retrospect, on the other hand, it was one of the most interesting and important periods for me. When I left the Foreign Service in 1979, I went to the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace for almost three years. I was out of the government, but my recollections were still fresh. Henry Kissinger's book “The White House Years” had just been published. It included a long chapter on South Asia and the India-Pakistan relations. I read that chapter and decided that he had not described the the events as I remembered them. So I wrote a rather long article on the tilt policy for Asian Survey. The article, depending of course on one's predilections, was pretty well received. Within the past six month, my wife met a professor at Penn, who told her that she had assigned the Kissinger chapter and my article to her students. That, I believe, is still being done in a number of colleges and universities where South Asia is being studied.

Q: Can you discuss the difference of working for Parker Hart and Joe Sisco?

VAN HOLLEN: They were very, very different. Sisco replaced Hart as Assistant Secretary, after only a few months of Hart's tenure in that job. When the new Nixon Administration came in, Secretary William Rogers, who had known Joe Sisco through his UN work replaced Hart. Parker Hart was essentially a Middle East specialist, who had been our Ambassador to Saudi Arabia and Turkey. He was a real career Foreign Service officer. Joe Sisco rose through a different route. He was essentially a Departmental officer; he had never served overseas. But he was an extremely adroit bureaucratic operator and I say that in a positive sense of the phrase. He had mastered the intricacies of the UN system when few others knew anything about it or was interested in it. He was a very important figure in terms of UN political affairs. It was through his UN background and his involvement in the UN on the Arab-Israeli issue that led to his appointment by

Rogers. Sisco had very good political antennae. He did not usually deal directly with Henry Kissinger directly when Kissinger was the NSC Adviser, but he did deal with Al Haig, who was the NSC Deputy Adviser during this period. Sisco was also very adroit with the press and with the Hill. Some people have argued that he was a manipulator and that he had his eye on the main chance. He was quite a different person than Parker Hart. Hart would not have been able to deal as directly with the press and the Hill as Sisco did. Sisco later became Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs—the number three position in the State Department.

Q: What was Secretary Rogers' role during the Indo- Pakistan war and the aftermath?

VAN HOLLEN: He did not play a very direct role. The senior person who was most interested in the issue was Jack Irwin, the Under Secretary, the number two man in the Department. He was a very thoughtful person and very sensitive. Irwin seemed to be sympathetic to the views of people like myself who felt that we should have had a more even- handed policy. But he didn't have that much influence in the bureaucracy as a whole and, because of the unquestionably unsatisfactory relationship between Henry Kissinger and William Rogers, the latter was cut out of much of South Asian policy. The opening to China was essentially a White House creation and Rogers, as far as I know, was unaware of the negotiations until they had been well under way for many months. On South Asian issues at least, Rogers did not play an important or central role. Irwin was interested in it, but as number two to a Secretary who did not have bureaucratic strength vis-a-vis the White House, he was not able to convert his views into policy changes.

Q: How did the Bureau view the creation of Bangladesh?

VAN HOLLEN: I may have been the author of the phrase “international basket case.” I went to a meeting at the White House, which Kissinger was chairing, with Alex Johnson who was there representing State. I made some smart side remark to Johnson about Bangladesh becoming an “international basket case” and he repeated it during

the meeting. It got out into the press and, unfortunately, this has been hung around Bangladesh's neck ever since. I am not proud of authorship of the phrase. Anyone looking at South Asia in the context of developments in the 50s and 60s would have recognized that over time, Pakistan was not viable divided into two parts because of the extraordinary dissimilarities between East and West Pakistan. The only thing that held them together was their mutual antagonism to India and the fact that they both had Moslem majorities. Islam itself, however, was not enough to hold Pakistan together because the Bengalis were so different ethnically, culturally and linguistically from the people in West Pakistan.

I don't have any strong feeling about Bangladesh in terms of its international standing. It is a case of a country which, despite its enormous population, weighs very little in the international equation. My only feeling was that the political developments in South Asia made inevitable the separation of East from West Pakistan. We should have recognized that fact and not pretended that General Yahya Khan or anybody else could have patched things up and held the country together. It was just a basic judgement that independence was inevitable. It was not judgement shared by everybody. It was my view that we should not have taken actions which would have seemed to support efforts by West Pakistan to hold East Pakistan in the same country. It was really more a judgement about the fact that independence would come rather than on any special feeling about Bangladesh.

Q: I would like now to turn to you final overseas assignment as Ambassador to Sri Lanka —formerly Ceylon. You were there from 1972 to 1976. How did that come about?

VAN HOLLEN: It came about because I had been in a Deputy Assistant Secretary position which often, but not always, is a stepping stone to an Ambassadorial appointment. I had expressed an interest in Sri Lanka and Joe Sisco supported me, even though our relationship was not always that close. I was endorsed by the White House even though I was not fully persona-grata there—partly because of the Bangladesh affair. But the judgement was probably made that I was a career Foreign Service officer who presumably knew South Asia and Sri Lanka would have been an appropriate assignment for me. I was

also given an endorsement by John Connally of Texas—under strange circumstances. Connally had taken a trip around the world in early 1972 and I was assigned to be the South Asia man for Connally on one leg of the trip. I seemed to have gotten along reasonably well with him. Connally had been Secretary of the Treasury . He had switched from Democrat to Republican and the rumor on the plane at the time was that Richard Nixon was going to drop Spiro Agnew as Vice-President and put Connally on the ticket as his Vice-Presidential candidate for the 1972 election. It didn't work that way. In any event, I was with Connally for two or three weeks, including the first visit of any high level American official to Bangladesh after its independence. Connally stopped in Dacca in early 1972. My appointment seems to have come about because of my rather good record in the Foreign Service, a helpful word from Connally and the fact that I hadn't made too many enemies in the White House.

Before I arrived in Sri Lanka, it had had an election in 1971 which brought into power a left-center Socialist government which had a fairly strong streak of anti- Americanism. The Bandaranaike government, headed by Mrs. Bandaranaike, kicked out the Peace Corps. The government was viewed by us as an unfriendly one. It consisted of three elements: one, the Sri Lanka Freedom Party—known as the SLFP—which was Mrs. Bandaranaike's party; then there were three Cabinet Ministers who were Trotskyites and there was one Minister from the Communist Party. It was definitely a left-center government which was anti-American in its orientation. That was the situation that greeted me upon my arrival, except that before I arrived, there had been an insurrection on the island by some young left wing Sinhalese youths. The government had applied to the U.S. for support. I was still Deputy Assistant Secretary for the area when this occurred. We had responded positively by providing some non-lethal equipment—such as helicopters—to assist in suppressing the rebellion. The fact that U.S. responded to the Sri Lanka request in time of need was one of the factors which made the government begin to turn around a bit. So when I arrived, the relationship, although not close, was better than it had been the year before. I benefited from that.

Q: What were American interests in Sri Lanka during the period 1972-76?

VAN HOLLEN: There were not transcendent interests, but there were some interests. This was a period during which we were in deep competition with the Soviets and the Chinese and both of those countries had active interests in Sri Lanka. So our concern was that there not be an excessive increase in Soviet or Chinese penetration, even though those two countries were no longer close—the break between them having taken place. Second, from a strategic point of view, although we did not covet the large naval base at Trincomalee, we wanted to be sure that no other country—i.e., the Chinese and Soviets—would be involved. Third, we were also building up Diego Garcia in the Indian Ocean and we were interested in having American ship visits into Colombo. It was a combination of not wanting the two other major powers to enhance their interests in the island and to have access ourselves for naval visits and trade.

Q: Did we have many commercial interests?

VAN HOLLEN: Very limited. Sri Lanka had three main exports: tea, rubber and coconut. We were interested in selling some products. There was some American business involvement in the pharmaceutical industry, Ever-ready batteries and other small businesses, but no large scale interests.

Q: How did you deal with the government?

VAN HOLLEN: One of the things I benefited from was that I was able to establish a good personal relationship with Mrs. Bandaranaike. I haven't kept up with her that closely, but I did send her a letter just a couple of months ago through Marion Creekmore, who is our new Ambassador there. I received a very nice letter back from her last week. I think it was felt by people serving there at the time, and I have heard subsequently, that my relationship with the top people in the government was a good one and it did contribute to positive U.S.-Sri Lanka relations. Having said that, I am not suggesting that the personal

part of the equation was by any means the entire reason. There were other factors. One was the fact that relationships were already beginning to improve before I arrived. Second, I think Mrs. Bandaranaike saw the United States over time, not initially, as an off-set to the Soviets and the Chinese. She was concerned about the left wing elements within her own Cabinet. She had real problems with the Trotskyites in particular. To the extent that we were seen as a countervailing force to an increase of Chinese or Soviet influence, she saw the U.S.-Sri Lanka connection more positively than when she first came to power. I benefited from that.

There were several instances in which Prime Minister Bandaranaike supported the U.S. position, even though it caused strains in her Cabinet. Her Finance Minister, for example, was a Trotskyite—a member of the LLSP party which purported to follow the teachings of Leon Trotsky. On that strange little island, the Trotskyites had three Cabinet posts, including the very important Finance portfolio—held by N.M. Perera, who was known as the "Golden Brain." I got along with these people pretty well. You have to know Sri Lanka to really appreciate this; even though these people would attack you in the press, they would come around in the evening to your receptions and drink your liquor. It was a pleasant environment in terms of personal relationships which could sometime take the sharp edges off the political attacks. So these people, on an individual basis, were by no means antagonistic, but they did not want to see Sri Lanka tied too closely to the United States.

Q: In looking at some of the reports, there seemed to have considerable press repression during the time you were there.

VAN HOLLEN: There was some. The press was reasonably free at the time. One of the things about the three countries in South Asia in which I served—India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka—is that all of them in a way derived advantages from the fact that they gained independence from the British. Whatever one thinks about the British Empire, it established well organized structures of government, endorsed the rule of law and

permitted active political participation in the latter stages of its rule. This meant that when these countries became independent they had already had some democratic experience. That doesn't mean that Pakistan wasn't under military rule for much of its history; it doesn't mean that Sri Lanka hasn't hedged its democracy in recent years; it doesn't mean that India did not go through a two-year emergency period. But over-all the British heritage was a positive factor in the post-independence environments of those countries. For American diplomats, that made those countries very interesting to serve in.

In the case of Sri Lanka, we also benefited from the fact that many Sri Lankans, in the immediate post-World War II period, were very well educated—more so than now. They later de-emphasized English and since 1983 the country has been torn apart by the Tamil-Sinhalese dispute and, more recently, by a revival of the leftist Sinhalese JVP group. These conflicts were not as prominent when I was there. There was an under-current of tension between the minority Tamils—who lived essentially in the north and east and who were Hindus—and the Sinhalese who were in the central and southern part of the Island who were Buddhists. This tension was manifested most directly in the assassination of the Mayor of Jaffna whom I called on when I went there. He was killed a couple of months later as a reflection of the feeling between the Tamil and the Sinhalese communities. While I was in Sri Lanka between 1972 and 1976, the domestic scene was reasonably stable and it is therefore upsetting to me to read about the developments in Sri Lanka since 1983. My period in Sri Lanka was very pleasant. My wife, Eliza, and I had our three young children with us and we look back on it as a very enjoyable period. Two of my children have returned to Sri Lanka for visits and we all have an attachment to the island.

Q: You were there when we left rather ignominiously from Vietnam. How did that play in Sri Lanka?

VAN HOLLEN: It played well and the U.S. opening to China also played well. The interesting thing was that partly because of the Nixon opening to China, partly because of what was perceived properly as Nixon's less-than-warm feeling toward India, Mrs.

Bandaranaike, leader of the left- center Freedom Party and Richard Nixon got along quite well in their one meeting in Washington which I attended. I can remember the great difficulty I had trying to explain to the government what “Watergate” was all about and why Nixon had resigned.

Q: We had the same trouble in Greece.

VAN HOLLEN: The meeting between the two leaders in Washington, and the Nixon policy toward China and the rather cool U.S.-Indian relationship were three factors that tended to make the U.S.-Sri Lanka relationships under Nixon quite good. That continued during the Ford period. That explains in part the concern when Nixon left the scene. The U.S. was no longer the country that Mrs. Bandaranaike had run against in her election in the early part of the decade. The Sri Lankans did not understand “Watergate”. They had their own problems of corruption, etc. but they could never fathom, and I could never successfully explain, what “Watergate” was all about or why the President of the United States had to resign. One of my jobs, of course, was to reassure them—and I tried to do this again and again—that under Gerald Ford, the new President, the relationship between our two countries would continue to be good. I did get out of the Ford White House an invitation to Mrs. Bandaranaike to visit Washington. She was never able to do it before Ford left office, but the fact that he did invite her was helpful.

Another element of U.S. interest in Sri Lanka was that as late as early and mid-70s, the Non-Aligned movement had a certain clout to it—I don't want to over state it—and Sri Lanka, for its size, was playing a fairly important role in that movement. In fact, one of the Non-Aligned summit meetings was held in Sri Lanka—after I left.

To re-cap, I would say that the U.S. relationship with Sri Lanka—a relationship between a major power and a small country—is a good example of a relationship in which ideology over time gave way to pragmatism, assisted by the international environment and by personalities. I don't take credit for the improvement, although I did have unusually good

relations with many of the senior officials of the Sri Lankan government. There was also the strange Nixon- Bandaranaike relationship which wasn't long-standing-based— one visit—but it did underscore that the personal equation, which is hard to weigh, is important. It can, of course, work the other way as well. When Indira Gandhi came to the States in 1971, according to Henry Kissinger in his book, it was the worst meeting Richard Nixon had with any foreign leader. That was a case in which the chemistry didn't work, but in the case of Mrs. Bandaranaike it did work.

Q: What was the relationship of Sri Lanka with India during your period?

VAN HOLLEN: It was reasonably satisfactory. Historically, there had been a good relationship between the Nehru and the Bandaranaike families. Both represented the Brahmins of their respective countries. The Nehrus are, in fact, high caste Brahmins under the Hindu caste system; although in Buddhist Sri Lanka technically there is no caste system, the Bandaranaikes were high caste Buddhists. Partly because of the family relationship, the relations between the two countries were reasonably good. There has always, however, been an underlying tension between the huge Indian land mass to the north and the little island of Sri Lanka hanging off to the south. That problem has been accentuated by the fact that about 18 percent of Sri Lanka's population is Tamil. Forty million people in South India are basically the same people ethnically and culturally. Thus, you have within Sri Lanka a Tamil minority which has increasingly felt oppressed by the Sinhalese majority, and that minority has sought support from across the Palk Strait in India. In quite a different context, there are some similarities between the Sri Lankan situation and the Cyprus situation in the sense that the Turkish Cypriot minority seeks protection through its relationship with mainland Turkey. The Tamils have done the same thing.

The relationship between India and Sri Lanka in recent years has deteriorated sharply because of the Indian military intervention into Sri Lanka two and half years ago. This has strengthened Sinhalese national elements who want to get the Indians out. The present

Indian government has indicated that it will withdraw its troops shortly. But the intervention in Sri Lanka, even though it came through a formal agreement between Rajiv Gandhi and J. R. Jayawardene, the current President of Sri Lanka, nonetheless brought about a rekindling of all the Sri Lanka-India strains. The sooner the Indians pull out, the better the relationship will be.

I might just add as a footnote that I also had the unusual experience of being an Ambassador accredited to a second country—the Republic of the Maldives. That is a country consisting of two thousand islands, two hundred of which are populated, located in the Indian Ocean southwest of Sri Lanka. I was therefore also Ambassador to the Maldives. We had no resident representation at that time. I visited there officially three or four times and went there once on a vacation. These days there are not many dual accreditations. There are some in the Pacific islands, but it is rare.

Q: Did we have interests in the Maldives?

VAN HOLLEN: Very few. At one time, the British used to stage aircraft through Gan in the Southern Maldives. Our basic interest is to ensure Maldivan independence and to discourage others from moving in.

Q: After you left in 1976, you came back to Washington.

VAN HOLLEN: Yes. I ran the Senior Seminar for two years. It is the equivalent of the Defense Department's National War College although much smaller. In my days there, 1976-78, it had about twenty-five members of the Seminar. My last tour was in the Inspection Corps for a year. I inspected several posts in Central America, two in East Asia—Korea and Indonesia—and I also inspected the Arabian Peninsula posts. I retired in October 1979. I have three jobs since then. First, I went to the Carnegie Endowment. Now, I am at the Middle East Institute. I have been here for almost three years as the Vice-President. My tour in the Inspection Corps was valuable to me later in my retirement period because it took me to the Arabian Peninsula and Persian Gulf—an area that I did

not know a great deal about previously, but I learned quite a bit about over several months there. Since I retired, I have felt comfortable dealing with Arabian Peninsula and Gulf issues, though these were not issues I had been directly involved in during my career.

Q: There are some questions we ask of all we interview. First of all, looking back on your career, what gave you the greatest satisfaction?

VAN HOLLEN: Although it is hard to pick out a single period, I would say that I derived my greatest satisfaction dealing with international political issues, which I had been interested in from the time I was a young man. I was very interested in domestic politics in school and college; I received a Ph.D. in Political Science from John Hopkins and the Foreign Service was an excellent opportunity to carry forward interests that I had developed as a young man. I particularly enjoyed the diversity of the assignments- -the fact that one moved periodically. I like the diversity; I liked the fact that at the end of three or four years you moved on to something else and overall, I found it a very fulfilling and stimulating career.

Q: If someone comes to you today and asks you about the Foreign Service as a career, what advise would you give?

VAN HOLLEN: The Foreign Service today is very different from the one that I joined in 1951. If you had interviewed people in 1951, they, of course, would have said that the Foreign Service was far different from the one that existed in the 1920s. To state the obvious, it is much less of an elitist institution; it is much more diversified in terms of the people; it is a much larger Service and contains many more women; it covers a lot more countries than it did in 1951 even though that was a period of blossoming for the Service. So in terms of the nature of the Foreign Service itself and in terms of the number of countries, it is quite different. Second, the issues are much broader than the bilateral ones—political, economic, consular. The whole field of science and technology, environment—all of these are new issues, which are reflected in the staffing and structure of the Department. They are reflected in the new expertise required. I am

not sure the Department has fully adjusted to this. In many ways, the heartland of the Department remains the Geographic Bureaus. Despite the emphasis on the importance of the economic officers, the political officer route is still often seen as the way to the top, although that is changing.

I would say that the position of the Foreign Service wife is very different from when I joined. I was very fortunate in that my wife, Eliza Farnsworth, whom I married in 1953, shared my interests in foreign affairs. She followed me dutifully around the world, post after post, even though she had an MA in Russian studies from Harvard and had little opportunity to pursue her substantive interests. When I was assigned to India, Pakistan, Turkey or Sri Lanka, she picked up and went, later with the children. I don't think that is true to the same degree today. That is one of the major differences in the Foreign Service. It is not as easy now when many wives want a career of their own. We have been very fortunate.

Just before I retired, my wife got a job in the Department in Intelligence and Research (INR)—I had nothing to do with it—dealing with a country very few people cared about, called Afghanistan. This was 1978, a year before the Soviets invaded Afghanistan. Last year she was named Director of the South Asian division of the Bureau. So she has had her own successful career independently of me for over ten years. But often it is not easy. It can be done under some tandem assignments if the wife is also a Foreign Service officer, but I think the position of the wife of a Foreign Service officer now is different and perhaps more difficult than it used to be.

End of interview